

Representative Bill Eickmeyer



2002 Legislative Preview

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Juvenile Justice & Family Law

Natural Resources

Rules

Trade & Economic Development (vice chair)

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Dear Neighbor,

By law, Washington's state Legislature meets every year: 105 days in odd-numbered years, and 60 days in even-numbered years. In ordinary times – not that we've had any of those for quite a while – the heavy lifting is done during the long session. That's when the state's biennial operating, transportation and capital budgets are hammered out. Also, because there is more time, these are the sessions when the most complex and significant bills on other issues, such as the environment or welfare reform, tend to be worked on.

The short session is then devoted to what you might call "housekeeping." I don't mean these sessions are less important; it's just that the work we usually do then isn't going to excite the headline writers at your local paper. We'll make mid-course corrections on our biennial budgets, for example, and tweak bills enacted during the previous session. That's also when we put the finishing touches on bills that may have been in the works for one, two, three or more years.

As I said, there haven't been many "ordinary" sessions lately, but 2002 promises to be the most extraordinary session in recent memory. We've got to completely rewrite the operating budget to correct for a deficit that's well over \$1 billion, and growing. We've got to step up and address the transportation crisis that is steadily choking western Washington. And we've got to do these things, and more, without bringing the roof down on our school kids, vulnerable seniors, or Mother Nature.

Big jobs, but not impossible. I'm looking forward to doing what we need to do and ending this session on time for a change. I'll send a full report later this spring, and in the meantime, please stay in touch with your suggestions and concerns. It's a privilege representing you in Olympia.

Sincerely yours,

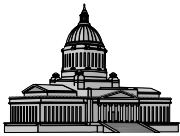
Bill Eickmeyer

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Making government work better



In the state Legislature, we'll keep working to streamline our government. We can do more to make Washington as competitive as possible for business – all the more critical as we deal with the effects of the national recession. With this in mind, one of the first actions of the new Democratic House majority was the creation of a special task force on economic competitiveness. The group will work with key industry and small-business leaders, and with the governor's Competitiveness Council, to identify actions we can take to improve state economic conditions.

There is much we can do at little or no cost. In the last five years, state agencies have repealed more than 8,000 state rules and have re-written some 9,000 more in plainer English, making them more useful to the general public. In total, 2,400 pages of the Washington Administrative Code have been axed due to not meeting such criteria as need, reasonableness, effectiveness, clarity, fairness, and consistency with legislative intent and statutory authority. This is a significant improvement in the way our state government works.

Land use and salmon recovery



One of my foremost goals as your representative is to restore healthy salmon runs to the Hood Canal. I will be introducing a Hood Canal Sanctuary bill this session. Because this is such a large step, we probably won't see its passage this year. But it's a start.

Trimming the budget



A nationwide recession made worse by the events of September 11, decreased revenues, rising state costs, increased numbers of lawsuits, and a growing population needing state services have all affected our state economy in adverse ways. We must look at the proposed budget with a critical eye and reduce or eliminate programs or services that are not necessary. Doing so will help balance our current budget and make our state government leaner and more competitive.

Education and other essential services



Paring the budget down to an acceptable level will be difficult, and no doubt, there will be few who will not be affected. We will work with the governor to ensure that the state K-12 schools remain fully funded in the new budget – while at the same time protecting our most vulnerable citizens and funding the kinds of essential services that citizens expect and deserve.

Transportation



Governor Locke has presented a transportation plan to address the state's worst traffic choke points by raising the gas tax 9 cents per gallon over the coming three years and increasing certain fees on trucks and newly-purchased cars. We will be taking a close look at his plan in the current session. As you may remember, a similar plan was proposed last session, but did not pass.

While I look forward to working with the governor and my fellow legislators to come up with the best possible plan that addresses this critical problem, I do not advocate it being passed into law by the Legislature. Instead, I believe this should be approved and sent on by the Legislature to be voted on in a public referendum.